

## Notes on Plotinus - Ennead Three, Fourth Tractate - On Our Guardian Spirit

### **3.4.1 Soul, Form, and Indefiniteness**

While some Principles generate without moving, Soul generates through its motion. The Universal Soul is itself in motion when engaging in its characteristic acts. Namely, imparting growth, generation, and sensory faculties to everything within Nature extending down to the sphere of plants. Soul also expresses its characteristic acts within Human Beings, though it does not do so by dominating. Soul only governs and comprises a portion of Human Nature. In plants however, Soul is sovereign, acting as though it were alone. Beyond the sphere of plants, Soul ceases to act in the same way. After all, what is beneath the sphere of plants is not alive.

What can be said of that which is anterior to the sphere of plants?

That which Soul animates comes into Being without Form. That which is animated must receive Form from that which gives it Life. Thus, that which is beneath the sphere of plants cannot be a modality of Soul itself, as it is lifeless. Without Form, that which is beneath plants and subject to generation then must be purely Indefinite. While animated Beings are not perfectly definite (only Intellectual Beings are perfectly Definite), they are not pure Indefiniteness since they have been Formed. Animated Bodies are merely incomplete and subject to flux. On the other hand, that which has no Form must be pure Indefiniteness. When this Indefiniteness (i.e. pure Matter) is Formed, a Body is generated. This Body then becomes the medium for the expression various potentials. Thus, the Body is the final thing within the realm of manifestation and expression of Form. This is because there can only be pure Indefiniteness beneath it.

### **3.4.2 You Become What You Do**

As Plato wrote, "Soul, considered collectively, has the care of all that is Soulless..." (See Plato's Phaedrus, 246B-C). Particular Souls achieve this purpose in their own individual ways. Thus, Plato Continues, "...and it traverses the whole heaven, appearing sometimes in one form and sometimes in another." (See Plato's Phaedrus, 246B-C). This is to say that sometimes it imparts rational faculties, other times sensory faculties, and other times merely growth. The phase of Soul dominant in each place is sovereign, while those phases of Soul which are not in effect are absent or idle.

With regards to a Human Being, the lower phases of Soul do not dominate, but accompany their higher counterparts. In fact, sometimes the highest phase of Soul is not dominant in a Human being. This is because each phase of Soul has its place. Thus, Human Beings are reasonable, but also sensitive due to their sensory organs. In many ways, a Human Being resembles plants, as they both grow and consume nutrition. Thus, Reason, Sense, and Growth all act within Human Beings. Yet it is the best of these which characterizes the totality of a Human Being. Thus, Human Beings are referred to as reasonable. However, when Soul ceases to animate a Body, it acts in accordance with how it primarily behaved while embodied. Therefore, we must take flight and leave behind the world of Bodies for the Divine above (See Plato's Theaetetus, 176A). Otherwise, we will fall into the trap of sensations by pursuing sensory experiences, or fall into the trap of growth by perusing reproductive pleasure and luxurious foods. Instead, we seek use of our Intellectual faculty to reach Nous and Divinity.

Those who live as Human Beings will be reborn as Human Beings. Those who lived by sensation will return as lower Animals. Those who let their passions rule them will return as wild beasts. Our disposition in our current life determines our lot in the next life. Those who pursue appetites and pleasure will become gluttonous and lascivious animals. Those who seek sensory experiences without

passion or appetite will become mere plants, as they have practiced living as a tree. Those who were pure, but overindulge in music become songbirds. Rulers become eagles if tyranny is their only Vice. The astrologers who always set their focus on the Heavenly Realm become birds who soar to great heights. Those of us who excel in Civic Virtue will become Human again, while those who are only slightly Civically Virtuous will become bees or other social creatures.

### **3.4.3 The Dominant Phase of Our Soul Dictates the Dominant Phase of Our Soul in the Next Life**

What then is our Daemon, the dominant phase of our Soul? It is the phase which is dominant in the sensible world. What then is our Divinity? It is the Divinity which is present within us in the sensible world. That which directs us after death is the same as that which directs us while embodied.

Is this the same as the spirit (i.e. Guardian) we are assigned at our generation (See Plato's Republic, 10.620d-e and Phaedo, 107d-e)? No, our allotted Guardian is antecedent to our Daemon. Our Guardian is the inactive phase of Soul higher and antecedent to our Daemon, which is the dominant phase of our Soul that acts. If the dominant phase of our Soul (i.e. Our Daemon) is the Unreasoning Soul (i.e. our base sense perceptions and emotions), then our Guardian is the Reasoning Soul. If the dominant phase of our Soul is the Reasoning Soul, then our Guardian is the phase above (i.e. the Intellectual Soul). Our Guardian silently presides over us, allowing our Daemon to act. This is what Plato means when he writes that we choose our own God (See Plato's Republic, 10.617e). The phase of our Soul that we choose to be dominant (i.e. our Daemon) dictates that phase which resides above it (i.e. our Guardian).

How does our Daemon come to dominate our actions? In fact, our Daemon only dominates our embodied life. After our Destiny is achieved (i.e. we die), our Daemon can no longer act, as the life it dictated the acts of is over. Our Guardian then desires to take control and becomes our Daemon if we have elevated our character and proven worthy. This new Daemon dictates our next life and possesses a Guardian above it as well. If we have failed to become worthy of our Guardian, we are punished and downgraded in our next life. The Evil are punished with a lower life commensurate with their moral character. If we follow our Guardian, we are improved by sharing in its Nature. As we improve, our Guardian is always one step above, and so we can follow a path of continued improvement over many lives until we reach the highest heights.

The Soul is many things. It is both the inferior and the superior. Thus, it includes all things. Further, each of us is an Intellectual Cosmos, connected to the sensible world through the lower phase of our Soul, and to the Intellectual by the higher phase of our Soul. We remain in Divine Intellect via our Intellectual Soul, and we remain bound to the sensible world via our Unreasoning Soul. Thus, we are an emanation from above to below. Yet this Act which begets us does not diminish our higher self in any way.

### **3.4.4 The Universe as a Whole Is Silent and Unmoved**

Is this lower phase of our Soul always embodied? It is not. As we return to Intellect, the entirety of our Soul returns as well.

Does this apply to the Soul of All, such that its lower phase returns to Intellect as well? Since it never descends, the Soul of All does not return to Intellect either. The Soul of All has no beginning or point in time at which it becomes embodied. The Soul of All remains unmoved above. It is the Material cosmos that harmonizes to it. This harmony takes the form of the Material world receiving illumination from the Soul of All. Just as a light is not diminished by the things it illuminates, neither is the Soul of All affected by its illumination of everything beneath it.

Does the Universe itself have sense perceptions? Plato writes that it has no use for eyes, ears, nostrils, or tongue given that there is nothing beyond it to sense (See Plato's *Timaeus*, 33c).

Does the Universe possess sentience, such that it is self-aware? Since everything within it unfolds according to Nature, it is in silent repose. Thus, it feels neither pleasure nor pain. The power of growth exists within it, but it itself does not grow. The same is true of sense perceptions. This topic will be revisited in another text, as we have sufficiently expanded upon it for the conversation at hand.

### **3.4.5 The Soul Chooses Its Daemon, and the Daemon Is Fixed by Reference to Its Guardian**

If a Soul chooses their Daemon and next life while disembodied and within the Intellectual sphere, how can we say that a Human Being is in control of their actions when in the sensible realm?

The answer is that when we say a Soul chooses their Daemon and next life, this is only meant allegorically. This allegory refers to the Soul's disposition and character wherever it may be.

If the character and disposition of soul is the authoritative source of actions, and if Soul itself is dominated by its phase that was most predominantly utilized, then how can the body be responsible for the Evil actions a Soul undertakes? After all, Soul's character and disposition are antecedent to its embodied life, determine the Daemon it chooses, and Plato asserts that a living Being does not change its Daemon while embodied (See Plato's *Republic*, 10.620d-e). How then can the Goodness or Evil of person be a product of their embodied life?

Perhaps a human Being has the potential for both Good and Evil, but becomes one or the other in accordance with the actions they choose. Then what happens when a Virtuous Soul animates a dysfunctional body, or when a Vicious Soul animates an exceptional body? Soul of either inclination has a varying degree of influence over the form of its body, since external events do not completely dictate the actions a body engages in. Plato writes that Souls are presented with potential lots in life, and then the external factors that will affect them. Souls then choose a life in accordance with their character (See Plato's *Republic*, 10.619b). Thus, according to Plato, Souls determine the conditions of their life to come.

In *Timaeus*, Plato indicates the relationship we have with our Guardian. It is not entirely separate from us, but it is not bound to us either. It is also not the part of us with agency. It is ours in the sense that it is a phase of our Soul. Yet it is not ours, given that we are Human Beings and by definition exhibit a Daemon directly subordinate to our Guardian (See Plato's *Timaeus*, 90a). This is the only way to understand this passage without resulting in a contradiction. Thus, the Guardian is the fulfiller of Soul's choice (See Plato's *Republic*, 10.620e). Its position as the phase of Soul directly above the one which is dominant within us entails that our dominant phase will not descend or ascend in this life. After all, our Guardian would no longer be the phase of Soul directly above our Daemon if we were to descend to a lower phase of Soul or rose to a higher phase. Thus, the dominant character of a Human Being remains as it begins.

### **3.4.6 The Cycle of Embodiment and Our Guardian Spirit**

What is the Virtuous person? It is the person who engages with their Guardian, the higher phase of their Soul. One is not Virtuous merely because this higher phase is present in their life. The Virtuous person engages with their Intellect, their Guardian. For it is the Guardian of a Human Being which is also their Divinity.

What if someone has the Intellectual Soul as their active phase of Soul, (i.e. their Daemon)? Does this not exalt the person to Intellect, and require their Guardian to be above Intellect (i.e. Nous) itself? Yes, such a person's Guardian must be The Good itself (that which is superior to Nous). In this case, why doesn't such a person achieve The Good from the beginning of their generation? They fail to do so due to the disturbance caused by their generation into the sensible world. Yet the tendency towards The Good in such a person existed internally within them prior to their embodiment.

Does this mean our Guardian necessarily exalts us to its higher phase? No, the Soul has its own inclination, and this inclination leads it towards the life of its own choosing. Our Guardian ceases to be our Guardian upon guiding us to Hades. That is, unless we choose to live a life governed by the same Daemon as our previous embodiment.

What happens to our Guardian after we die? From Phaedo, Plato tells us that it returns to the existence it had prior to our embodiment. It is then presented as an option to the Souls receiving their judgement after their latest embodiment. In this period, Souls do not live so much as they experience expiation.

Do the Souls which become beasts also possess a Guardian? Yes, but they possess a lowly Guardian commensurate with their lowly lives as beasts.

What of the Souls which elevate to a higher phase? Some dwell in the highest phase of the sensible world, while others leave it behind. The highest Souls in the sensible world become the Heavenly Bodies (i.e. the stars and planets). The better Souls become stars, while the lesser souls become planets and firmaments in accordance with their level of achievement in Reason. Not only is there a microcosm of Divine Intellect within each of us, but also a microcosm of the Soul of All. Just as the Soul of All has powers which extends to both the things which move and the things which are static, so too does our individual Soul extend to the parts of us which are in motion and those which are fixed. Each has a purpose and Natural Function. The Souls which are elevated from life on Earth to the Heavenly Bodies animate a star or planet commensurate with their own level of development towards their Guardian. They will possess a Guardian just superior to their current level of attainment, however this must be examined more closely at another time.

Souls which ascend beyond sensible world have transcended the need for a Guardian and the fate of embodiment. As long as they remain within Divine Intellect, they still possess an inclination towards generation. Thus, they engage in the process of generating Bodies, though not in a way which diminishes them. Rather, they manifest with the same unified Essence and magnitude into multiple bodies, as is the nature of Intellectual Beings (See Plato's Timaeus, 35a). Many Beings are generated from a single Intellectual Being via Soul. Just as one plant begets many others. In some cases, it begets almost everlasting life, as is seen in some plants. In other cases, the Animated Being dies, yet this death begets further life. For example, a dead animal or felled tree becomes the source of many additional living Beings (e.g. fungus, etc.). The power of Animation, Life, and growth is the same in the sensible world as it is in the higher realms. All life derives from the Soul of All.

If a Soul Animates another body after the death of its previous body, it will possess a life in accordance with the way it previously lived. Depending upon how it previously lived, it will receive the same Guardian as before, or a new one. Upon embodiment, Soul enters into this world as though it were adrift on a ship. On embodiment, Soul is subject to the Spindle of Necessity (See Plato's Republic, 10.616c). Thus, Soul takes its place in accordance with its allotted fortune. As the Heavenly Realm spins, the Soul is driven like a sailing ship in the wind. Souls, like sailors, are moved both by the motion of their

ship, but also their own internal impulses. After all, though a sailor is on a ship, they move about its deck as individuals. People do not behave the same way under the same circumstances. Thus, different people have different outcomes from identical circumstances. This is the Nature of Destiny.